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EDITORIAL

FOREWORD TO THE SMALL WILD CATS SPECIAL ISSUE

Angie Appel & Shomita Mukherjee

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FOREWORD TO THE SMALL WILD CATS SPECIAL ISSUE

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We are delighted to present this first special issue on small wild cats on a special occasion—the Journal of Threatened Taxa’s 21st anniversary!

Small wild cats are fascinating but elusive. Biologists are only beginning to fathom their vital ecological roles in maintaining and preserving biodiversity. Yet, surveys and conservation efforts targeting them are still underfunded. Most of them live in the long shadow cast by the more widely known *Panthera* cats that attract the lion’s share of international funding. Much of what we know about small wild cats is a result of by-catch data from camera trap surveys targeted at larger mammals. There is still a dearth of people with passion for and expertise in research and conservation of small wild cats. With this issue, we hope to raise your awareness for their conservation needs and inspire you to join us in unravelling their mysteries.

The European Wildcat *Felis silvestris* is the only one presented in this issue that benefits from a conservation program. Running in Germany since 2004, this program aims at relinking forests and doubling the area inhabited by Europe’s smallest cat until 2019. The authors scrutinize the relation between camera trap locations, human disturbance, and photographic capture success of Wildcats in an unprotected forest.

Two contributions focus on small wild cats in Uzbekistan’s Kyzylkum Desert. One accounts of the cryptic Sand Cat *Felis margarita* caught red-handed in the act of feeding on a large kill. The authors were fortunate to happen upon amazing video footage. The other sheds

light upon the fate of the Caracal *Caracal caracal* in the country. The author presents a sublime collection of records obtained during expeditions of over 2,000km on dusty roads to remote areas.

For decades, both the Fishing Cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* and the Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa* were known to inhabit Nepal’s subtropical jungles. And still, they show up in entirely unexpected sites, prompting the authors to contribute a new locality record for both species.

The cat of many costumes is known to occur in India since the 1830s but has remained elusive in Buxa Tiger Reserve for more than 175 years. The reserve’s personnel discloses new records of the Asiatic Golden Cat *Catopuma temminckii*.

For the first time in India, a team of 14 authors pooled their records on small wild cats obtained during several years of camera trapping. Their contribution provides enthralling insights into the activity patterns of the Asiatic Golden Cat, the Clouded Leopard, the Marbled Cat *Pardofelis marmorata*, and Asia’s most successful small wild cat, the Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*.

Asia’s smallest wild cat broke a record in Sri Lanka. The Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* showed up at a location where nobody would ever have expected it. The authors also present evidence for a breeding population of the species in a montane forest in the country.

You need to know a cat’s prey to understand its habits, once wrote a renowned wildlife scientist. A team

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of four authors took this insight to heart and into the field of a biosphere reserve in Thailand. For their study on the Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*, they used a novel approach—they simultaneously set up camera traps and caught rodents—with intriguing results!

A team of eight authors set out tracing records of Fishing Cat in Thailand, teasing apart authenticated from alleged ones. Their update reveals that not only protected areas provide suitable habitat for the ‘queen of the marshes’. It also indicates that the Fishing Cat found a group of champions who are committed to its protection!

Ten years of continuous camera trapping surveys reveal the diversity of small wild cats in Central Kalimantan: the Marbled Cat, the Sunda Clouded Leopard *Neofelis diardi*, the Bay Cat *Catopuma badia*, the Sunda Leopard Cat *Prionailurus javanensis*, and the Flat-headed Cat *P. planiceps*. The authors give a comprehensive insight into their ecology and persistence in Borneo’s fire-prone peat-swamp forests.

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We have one wish—that we will all be inspired by the curiosity and enthusiasm of those who contributed to this issue, particularly when it comes to understanding and protecting our environment. As Alexander von Humboldt wrote, people only protect what they love. If people are to protect small wild cats, they must first and foremost understand and come to have a profound affection for nature to marvel and admire, but above all, to recount gripping tales.

Stay fascinated and share your experiences about small wild cats for the next issue!





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